

Making Three Lists and Checking Them A lot

by Sandy Maynard

For those of you who are impulsive and/or disorganized, making a "Holiday To-Do List" early is a must. Deciding what to put on it (and what NOT to put on it) however can be confusing. There are activities to schedule, parties to attend, gifts to buy and greetings to send. I suggest you break your holiday agenda down into three master lists.

List # 1: Activities

Don't wait until the last minute to plan the activities you choose to leave on your list. Plan them now. Get out your Daytimer or Palm Pilot. Block out time to shop, cook, or just plain have fun. Buy tickets for events early. Write out cards early and have them all ready to go by a cutoff date. Past that date, let it go and don't worry about it. It just plain didn't get done and that is all there is to it. Move on to other things and don't crowd the rest of your holiday schedule by trying to squeeze it in still.

Following are some suggestions of what your list might include. Be sure to add your own.

- synagogue/church activities
- card sending
- gift giving/wrapping/ mailing
- party hosting/attending
- family fun: caroling, sleigh rides, skating, skiing, etc.
- viewing special holiday displays or lights
- volunteer work and/or holiday donation
- food shopping/menus
- tree and indoor/outdoor decorating
- pictures with Santa
- romantic time with partner
- holiday movies/theater/concerts
- holiday cleaning
- family and/or friend get-togethers
- holiday baking/cooking
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Recipient Budgeted	(Maximum)
Spouse	\$150
Mom	\$ 30
Dad	\$ 30
Sister and Husband	\$ 30
Brother and Wife	\$ 30
Nieces and Nephews up to \$10 each, total:	\$ 50
Grandma Smith	\$ 30
Grandma and Grandpa Jones	\$ 30
Best Friend and Husband	\$ 30
Friends (3) \$30 total (up to \$10 each)	\$ 30
X	\$ 10
X	\$ 10
X	\$ 10
Cards and Miscellaneous	\$ 30
Total	\$ 500

List #2: Gift Giving Budget

Making a gift giving list and deciding a spending limit for each person on the list is a lifesaver (and money-saver) for anyone, but especially those of us prone to last-minute shopping.

First, decide what your overall budget is for gifts and cards this season. Then write down the names of family and friends that you usually see over the holidays and exchange gifts with. On the list, put a few blanks for those last minute gifts you really did forget about, with an amount to spend on each that is within your budget – and stick to that number!

List #3: Getting Gifts and Cards to the Right Place at the Right Time

Make a third list of tips or things you can do to make gift giving and card sending manageable. This is the list you want to check a lot! Keep it with you as a reminder that you can't and aren't expected to do it all and that shortcuts are quite all right during the busiest time of the year. This list might include the following. Be sure to add your own ideas, especially the ones you might forget about.

Sending Holiday Cards:

1 Send e-mail cards. They save on postage and are a lot of fun! Some websites are: www.bluemountain.com, greetings.yahoo.com/, www.greeting-cards.com, www.egreetings.com, and www.regards.com. Use e-mail for party invitations too, instead of cards. Great invitations can be found at www.evite.com and www.bluemountain.com.

2 Enter your holiday card list into a database (or export your Outlook, Palm or other address book) and do a mail merge for labels. Use a festive holiday looking script and colored font. Heck while you are at it, print out two sets of labels, so next year's is already done.

3 If you send cards and do them by hand, pare down your recipients. Have cards/invitations, and stamps stored in a bag with handles, so you can grab it to-go. Write cards while waiting for an appointment or riding on the metro.

Shopping for, Wrapping and Sending Gifts:

1 Shop on-line or by catalog. Have gifts sent directly to your family and friends. You don't

need a web address, just do a search for your favorite store and you are there in seconds with no traffic hassles or slippery roads!

2 Hire a personal shopper if you can afford one. Some of the more upscale department stores, such as Macys, and independent sales representatives from companies such as Avon, supply this service.

3 Know the favorite store of the person you are shopping for? Get them a store gift card. Since most gift cards can be used on-line, it makes a no-hassle gift to both give and receive. And don't forget teens love cash!



4 Gift Baskets and flowers are lovely to get and easy to send. Check out one of the following sites: www.nationwideflorists.com, www.1800flowers.com, www.justflowers.com, and www.emailflowers.com, www.hallmark.com and www.flowersonly.com. You can even send free virtual flowers from www.800florals.com.

5 Use gift bags instead of wrapping.

6 Have gifts wrapped at the mall by a non-profit organization and feel good about the donation you make.

7 If you insist on wrapping, do a gift wrapping supply inventory (gift-wrap, ribbons, tags, scotch tape, and boxes) early. Store everything in a large, simple cardboard box and keep it easily accessible during the season.

Now, look back on the lists and decide what you really don't like doing. Maybe your children are getting older and you don't really need to drag out the plastic Santa this year and wire it up on the roof. If everybody still wants Mr. Santa up there, then delegate, barter or beg to get it off your list. If no one else wants to do it either, then maybe it is time to change tradition and it is ok to change tradition. ■

Coach Sandy Maynard is ADDitude's Expert Coach on Call. For more information on coaching, or to contact Sandy, visit www.sandymaynard.com